Vestments worn by Orthodox Christian Clergy

By Fr Thomas Hopko

In the Orthodox Church the clergy vest in special clothing for the liturgical services. There are two fundamental Christian vestments, the first of which is the **baptismal robe.** This robe, which is worn by bishops and priests at the service of holy communion and which should always be white, is the "robe of salvation": the white garment in which every Christian is clothed on his day of baptism, symbolising the new humanity of Jesus and life in the Kingdom of God (Rev 7:9ff).

The second fundamental vestment for Christian clergy is the **stole or *epitrachelion*** which goes around the neck and shoulders. It is the sign of the pastoral office and was originally made of wool to symbolize the sheep -- that is, the members of the flock of Christ -- for whom the pastors are responsible. Both bishops and priests wear this vestment when they are exercising their pastoral office, witnessing to the fact that the ministers of the Church live and act solely for the members of Christ's flock.

As the Church developed through history the vestments of the clergy grew more numerous. Special **cuffs** for deacons, priests, and bishops were added to keep the sleeves of the vestments out of the way of the celebrants during the divine services. When putting on their cuffs, the clergy read lines from the psalms reminding them that their hands belong to God.

A special **belt** was added as well to hold the vestments in place. When putting on the belt the clergy say psalms which remind them that it is God who "girds them with strength" to fulfil their service. Only the bishops and priests wear the liturgical belt.

All orders of the clergy wear a special outer garment. Deacons, sub-deacons, and readers wear a robe called a ***sticharion***. It is probably the baptismal garment, decorated and made more elaborate. Deacon and sub-deacons also wear a stole called the ***orarion***, probably originally a piece of material upon which were inscribed the liturgical litanies and prayers (*orare* means to pray). The deacon still holds up the *orarion* in a position of prayer when he intones his parts of the divine services. The sub-deacon's *orarion* is placed around his back in the sign of the cross.

Priests wear their white baptismal robe over which they have their pastoral stole, cuffs and belt. They also wear a large garment called a ***phelonion*** which covers their entire body in the back and goes below their waist in front. This vestment was probably developed from the formal garments of the early Christian era and, under the inspiration of the Bible, came to be identified with the calling of the priestly life. When putting on his *phelonion*, the priest says the lines of Psalm 132: *Thy priests, O Lord, shall clothe themselves in righteousness, and the saints shall rejoice with joy always now and ever and unto ages of ages. Amen.*

The bishops traditionally probably also wore the *phelonion* over which they placed the ***omoforion***, the sign of their episcopal office as leading pastor of the local church. When the Christian empire was captured by the Turks in the fifteenth century, however, the Christian bishops of the East were given civil rule over all Christians under Turkish domination. At that time, since there was no longer a Christian empire, the bishops adopted the imperial insignia and began to dress as the Christian civil rulers used to dress. Thus, they began to wear the *sakkos*, the imperial robe, and the mitre, the imperial crown. They also began to stand upon the orlets (the eagle) during the divine services and to carry the staff which symbolised more their secular power than their pastoral office.

At that time as well, the word *despota* (master) -- a title for temporal rather than spiritual power -- was used in addressing the bishops, and the clergy began to grow long hair which was also a sign of earthly rule in former times.

Our own Bp. Paul on the day of his consecration

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In the Church some of these new insignia were "spiritualised" and given a Biblical meaning. Thus, the **mitres** became signs of Christian victory, for the saints receive their crowns and reign with Christ (Rev 4:4). The eagle became the sign of the flight to the heavenly Jerusalem since it is the classical Biblical symbol of St. John and the fourth gospel (Rev 4:7; Ez 1:10). The staff became the symbol of Aaron's rod (Ex 4:2), and so on. It should be understood, however, that these particular insignia of the bishop's office are of later and more accidental development in the Church.

In relation to the bishop's service in the Orthodox Church, the use of two special candelabra with which the bishop blesses the faithful also developed. One of these candelabra holds three candles (**trikeri**) (at right) while the other holds two candles (**dikeri**) (at left). These candelabra stand for the two fundamental mysteries of the Orthodox faith: that the Godhead is three Divine Persons; and that Jesus Christ, the Saviour, has two natures, being both perfect God and perfect man.

Bishops and priests in the Orthodox Church also wear other special garments. There is a diamond-shaped (**epigonation**) garment worn by both priests and bishops as a sign of distinction or as a special distinction of service. Probably these cloths were originally "liturgical towels." Their symbolical meaning is that of spiritual strength: the sword of faith and the Word of God. They hang at the sides of their wearers during divine services.

Engolpion is a general term for something worn upon the bosom. As a bishop's vestment, it refers to a medallion with an icon in the center. It is often referred to as a ***Panagia*** because the All-holy Theotokos is the subject of its icon. All primates and some bishops below the rank of primate have the dignity of a second engolpion, which usually depicts Christ.

There are also clerical hats which carry special meaning in some Orthodox Churches. The ***kalimafhi*** is normally worn by all Greek priests, but only by some clergy as a special distinction in other national Orthodox churches. The *kalimafhi* is usually black, and monks and celibate clergy wear it with a black veil called the *epanokalimafho*. In other Orthodox churches the *mitre* (a remnant of the byzntine emperor's crown) is worn by bishops in liturgical settings to signify their civil authority of the Church.

Finally, it must be mentioned that bishops and priests wear a pectoral cross. The bishops also wear the *engolpio* (an amulet worn around their neck with an image of Mary and the Child (panagia -- the "all holy). The pectoral cross is worn liturgically only by those priests given the special right to do so as a sign of distinction.

"Pectoral cross (orthodox)" by Testus - Own work. Licensed under CC BY-SA 3.0 via Wikimedia Commons http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Pectoral_cross_(orthodox).jpg#mediaviewer/File:Pectoral_cross_(orthodox).jpg

The Orthodox Church is quite firm in its insistence that liturgical vesting is essential to normal liturgical worship, experienced as the realization of communion with the glorious Kingdom of God, a Kingdom which is yet to come but which is also already with us in the mystery of Christ's Church.

The **orlets** (Russian: Орлец, meaning eaglet), is a small rug, usually round, for an Orthodox bishop to stand on during services at which he officiates. The eagle depicted on the rug represents an eagle overlooking and hovering over a city, just as the bishop through his consecration is called to be an overseer of his city, the flock entrusted to his care. It is used primarily in the Russian Orthodox Church.

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Vestments conclusion

The **crosier**, also **crozier**, (Greek: paterissa; Slavonic: Posokh) is carried by Orthodox bishops and senior monastics as a stylized staff of office and a symbol of authority and jurisdiction. The crosiers are staffs that generally come with one of two different tops: on one form the top of the crosier is usually in the shape of the Greek letter *Tau*, with the arms curving downward, and the other is surmounted by a small cross. Crosiers are usually made of fine metal often gilded or silver plated. Some may be made of fine wood.

The crosier is carried by bishops, archimandrites, abbots, and abbesses. The crosier is presented to a new bishop by the chief consecrator following the dismissal at the Divine Liturgy when the bishop is consecrated. For archimandrites, abbots, and abbesses, the crosier is conferred at the time of their investitures. The crosier is carried by the bishop while outside the altar, and it is not taken within the altar area, that is behind the iconostasis. When the bishop enters the altar the crosier is placed leaning against the iconostasis next to the icon of Christ to the right of the Royal Doors.

When the prelate is not vested for services in the church, he uses a different, smaller staff that is in the form of a walking stick topped with a silver pommel.

The Archbishop of Cyprus is uniquely privileged among the bishops in carrying a crosier that is shaped like scepter used by the Eastern Roman emperors. This privilege is one of the ‘’Three Privileges’’ granted to the Church of Cyprus by Emperor Zeno.

40 DAYS MEMORIAL

January 22: Diane Northrup / Roger Seglem
January 29: Terrorist attack in Germany & Turkey
February 5: Russian choir who died in plane crash
February 12: Those who lost their lives in Fl. Airport
February 19: 2 police officers killed in Fl.

Our nation will not know healing in any measure through the work of mutual shaming. There is no life to be found in it, only anger, depression and the continued darkening of our culture. Only light gives life. Creating is difficult, careful work. Destruction is easy - child's play. Forgive those who do not deserve it. Forgive before they ask. Forgive as though it is Judgment Day and your own soul will be held to the scrutiny you extend to others. It's ok. You won't lose anything through forgiveness. In holding onto the shame of others you will only increase your own.

Speak kindness. Be generous. Set your prisoners free. No more shame slaves.

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Source: http://teenshealth.org/en/teens/prescription-drug-abuse.html?WT.ac=ctq#

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